What utilities can do to positively affect their communities post-COVID-19

By Jeffrey Daigle
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It's time for utilities to start planning for business post-COVID-19. You've already responded quickly to the COVID-19 crisis, and are continually promising the safe distribution of electricity, natural gas, and water into customers' homes and businesses. The best thing you can do for your communities now is to prepare for the coronavirus aftereffects.

Be empathic toward all your customers

The US and Canada have seen a record number of unemployment claims in the past few weeks, and will likely experience more in the coming months. More of your residential customers will be relying on social services than previously. And when the COVID-19 curve flattens, they'll still be playing catch up with their bills. Be empathetic toward these situations, and help customers out where you can—don't immediately disconnect their services for nonpayment; choose to offer payment programs instead.

Many of your business, especially small business, customers are likely struggling to stay afloat. Some are shutting down during the pandemic and may never reopen. You'll need to think about how you can help your business customers get access to community and federal resources, such as those passed by the CARES Act, while assisting them with their expenses so they can keep their businesses operating.

Check out the recording for our web conference on credit and collections management during COVID-19

Utilities need to start planning for arrears now to help their customers later on. Our web conference A data-driven approach to credit and collections management during COVID-19 covered how to use data science to adapt to changes in the postpandemic market, why proactively engaging arrears-risk customers will save you money, and more.

Watch the recording

Review how COVID-19 has affected the economy within your service territory

A service territory that hosts a significant amount of tourism-related jobs will rebound differently than a community that hosts a lot of manufacturing. Use your customer and local economic data to determine:

- What problems your customers have
- What their priorities are
- What ways you can help

Provide personalized and targeted offerings

Using data science, you can put your customers into groups based on their needs and provide them with personalized programs and services. Do this research in advance, so when the economy is back up, you'll have already built your targeted marketing list.

Fund energy-efficiency measures for your residential customers

By offering free energy-efficiency programs and initiatives, you not only help local contractors but also give money back to the community. The contractor will need to buy supplies that can create additional retail jobs. And the utility customer can use their energy-efficiency savings to buy food or pay their bills.

How E Source is helping

E Source is committed to helping you serve your local communities. We're tracking the goodwill efforts of utilities across the US and Canada in our public spreadsheet, and encourage you to add your own utility's efforts to the list.

We're doing our part as well. If you work for an electric, gas, or water utility in the US or Canada, then you can sign up for an E Source account at www.esource.com and access our COVID-19 resource center for complimentary access to our coronavirus-related reports, tools, and events. Make sure to update your email preferences and select "COVID-19 (coronavirus)" to get weekly notifications about all our new content every Friday.

Go to the resource center

If you need custom advice on how to best serve your customers during and after the COVID-19 crisis, then schedule a consultation. We'd love to help.

About the authors

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Director

Jeffrey is an expert on contact center operations, customer experience, channel design, operations, digital engagement, and journey mapping. For Jeffrey, all channels can serve to delight the customer, transform behavior, and result in positive outcomes for both the customer and the organization. When he isn't evangelizing customer experience, working on a consulting project, or writing an article, Jeffrey can be found dissecting the latest technology. He holds a BAS in communication and French from the University of Colorado and is a Certified Customer Experience Professional (CCXP).

Talk back!

Let us know what you think. If you want to weigh in or chat about this topic, just email Sannie Sieper, E Source director of marketing.

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